Power of Social Media in Political Marketing – An India Based Empirical Study

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the importance of different factors of social media, along with relevant demographic variables of voters to predict a voter's preferred political brand, in the context of the Indian Lok Sabha elections. To identify the relevant demographic variables, we have gone through previous literature. However, due to the lack of substantial India-based academic literature that could help us to identify the important factors of social media campaign, we referred to US-based academic literature and attempted to obtain the superset of social media impact variables. Thereafter, we conducted focussed group discussions to identify the most important attributes, which we've used in our survey study. We have chosen greater Kolkata to conduct the survey. We have used multinomial logistic regression model with voters' preferred political brand as a dependent variable with four choices. We observed that there is no significant difference between the intercept and final (including all predictors) model and also found that no individual demographic and social media impact variables are significant predictors of voters' preferred political brand. We also measured comparative effect on different political parties for each independent variable. That would help political marketers to target specific segments with effective communication and campaign plan.

Keywords: political marketing, voter preference, social media, demography, machine learning models, India

1. Introduction

In developed nations like USA and UK, political marketing has been an important subject of study since 1940s (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and Mcphee, 1954; Oliver and Blake, 1946). Political marketing wants to accelerate and nurture relationships between individual elements of political brands like party, candidate and voters (Henneberg, 1996). Political marketing is a combination of politics, marketing, and campaign messaging. Political marketing is a process to understand the behaviour of political parties and voters and design communication accordingly.   (Scammell, 1999). At a macroscopic level, political marketing can be inspected vis-à-vis two major areas – political party and voters. Voter behaviour has been studied through the lens of consumer behaviour (Newman and Sheth,1984). In a similar way, political parties along with their candidates and party policies combined, have been studied as a political brand (Reeves, de Chernatony, and Carrigan 2006). Multiple factors can influence a voter's preference of a political party. These factors vary in terms of different regions, cultures, economies, age, gender; and no one particular campaign influence voters (O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2009). So, political parties have started to modify their strategy from focusing on campaigns before the election only to creating a regular and direct relationship with the voters (Grossman, 2006).

In recent years, social media has emerged as the powerful channel for this regular and direct communication with voters, in the field of political marketing (Harris & Harrigan, 2015). One of the first examples of social media adoption in political marketing can be seen in Barak Obama's election campaign in 2008 (Moufahim & Lim, 2009). During the presidential elections in USA (2008), Obama introduced Web 2.0 and social media to attract the young voters (French and Smith, 2010). This innovative and engaging social media strategy had helped Obama to become one of the most powerful politicians of his time (Fraser and Dutta, 2009). This kind of social media strategy   requires both credibility of the party leader and his/her control over the campaign messaging (Milewicz and Milewicz, 2014).   Similarly, Donald Trump's persona as party leader has overshadowed the impact of the Republican party on many voters ((Ahmad and Yazan, 2018). In 2019 UK elections, both Boris Johnson and conservative party have used digital and social media extensively and ran multiple campaigns in facebook and twitter to build and motivate their follower base (Moore, 2019).

By envisaging voters as consumers in the branding milieu, the involvement of voters through different social media sites like Facebook, Twitter etc can work as very relevant medium to create an engaging bond between the leaders and their followers (Libai et al., 2010). Social media was not only used by the political leaders of developed countries like Obama, Trump (Ahmad and Yazan, 2018), Boris Johnson (Moore, 2019), it is also used by the leaders of the developing countries such as Narendra Modi (Kapoor and Dwibedi, 2015; Rodrigues and Niemann, 2019), Imran Khan (Ashraf, 2013) but there are limited empirical studies, which used primary voter feedback to evaluate the impact of the same. Specifically, in Indian context, very few studies attempted to understand the power of social media campaigns through empirical studies in the context of political marketing.

In the context of current political scenario of India, why is predicting voter preference important?

India is the second most populated and largest democratic country. It maintains a federal-state structure since its independence in 1947. India has a total of 28 states and 8 union territories. Election Commission of India (ECI), an autonomous body, is responsible for all elections in India. There are two exclusive bodies at the national level (National Portal of India, 2023) – Lok Sabha (lower house of Indian Parliament) and Rajya Sabha (upper house of Indian Parliament). The members of the Lok Sabha are directly elected by the voters. The members of the Rajya Sabha members are selected by the support of the member of different parties, who are in turn elected through the Vidhan Sabha (state level elections).

In national level, Indian political marketing is mostly dominated by 2 major alliances – National Democratic Alliance (primarily led by Bharatiya Janata Party/BJP) and United Progressive Alliance (primarily led by Indian National Congress/INC) since last 30 years (Cole et al., 2012). There are also other strong regional parties in India (Calì and Sen, 2011). As of 2023, India has 6 national parties and 56 state parties (Singh, 2023). In this multi-party complex electoral system, with voters ranging between diverse age, religion, language, occupation, gender etc, understanding key factors of political marketing would be of great help for both practitioners and researchers of this field.

Among the limited studies available in the context of South Asian countries, few highlighted differences of voter's perspectives based on their urban and rural background (Chowdhury and Naheed, 2019), demography (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2016) etc. There are also qualitative studies which highlighted the positive impact of social media in Indian (Pathak et al. 2015; Jain and Ganesh, 2019) elections, but there are very few empirical and quantitative studies, to analyse the impact of a party's or a candidate's social media strategy to predict voter's preferred political brand. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to do an empirical research to predict a voter's preference during the Indian Lok Sabha (Lower house) elections, based on demography and the influence of prime ministerial candidate or party's social media campaign. To do this, this study first aims to do an extensive literature review of similar studies conducted both in developed and developing countries, to identify the research gap (if any) and accordingly formulate the research questions. Secondly, the study identifies critical demographic and social media impact factors (from previous literature) which may affect voter's decision. Finally, this study explores statistical techniques to find any significant impact or power of social media variables and demographic variables on voter's decision to choose preferred political brand.

2. Literature Review & Research Questions

We have used PRISMA (**Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses**) data flow framework to find relevant studies. PRISMA uses a 27 item checklist and four-phase data flow diagram. This structured approach of PRISMA is useful for authentic reporting of a systematic review. We used the four-phase data flow framework of PRISMA to systematically select studies in each stage (identification, screening, and eligibility) and finally ended with 83 relevant studies for this article.

To start with, we have searched keywords like voter behavior, social media, twitter, facebook, political party, party policy, party leader, political marketing, election, political brand etc in following databases –

- Taylor and Francis
- SAGE
- Google Scholar
- Emerald
- Business Source Complete
- Scopus
- Sciencedirect

We have found total 193 studies from above search and from the reference list of these studies, we have found

additional 121 studies. In total, we have found 314 studies in identification stage of PRISMA four-phase flow diagram. In **Screening** phase, 61 duplicates are removed and the number came down to 253. We have put following **exclusion criteria** in eligibility stage –

- Not related to our study objective, means exclude those studies which do not focus on political party or party leader's influence (n = 83)

- No proper study framework present, means that these studies did not follow any proven framework to analyze (n = 37)

- No proper results presented, means no definitive or relevant conclusions are made from the study (n = 19)

Total 139 studies are excluded based on above criteria. On remaining 114 studies, we have put following **inclusion criteria** which removed another 25 studies –

- Published in peer-reviewed journals or in good conference of political marketing discipline (14 articles published in non peer-reviewed or different discipline journals)

- In primary survey, response bias is addressed (7 articles does not mention about handling bias in survey questionnaire)

- Robust methodology or analogy is mentioned to derive conclusion   (Conclusion is under developed for 4 articles)

Based on above inclusion criteria, finally 82 studies are included Out of 82 included studies, most of the studies got published in globally renowned journals related to politics. For example, we have reviewed 8 studies from Journal of Political Marketing, 4 studies from Journal of Politics, 3 studies each from American Political Science Review, Journal of Political Studies, and Journal of Marketing Management.

A voter prefers the party and the candidate who takes a strong position on issues that resonate with the voter's choice (MacDonald, Rabinowitz, and Listhaug 2001; Cho and Endersby 2003). In addition, a voter's decision is also affected by other influences that are similar to the voters' preferred ideology or characteristics (Zeng 2000; Glasgow 2001; Dow and Endersby 2004). Post 2000s, social media has emerged as one of the powerful mediums that can influence a voter's decision to choose a political party or candidate (Hong and Nadler, 2012). Voter feedback data, generated on different social platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc (in raw textual form) are analysed through natural language processing techniques (NLP) to find voter sentiments (Coletto, Mauro & Lucchese, Claudio & Orlando, Salvatore & Perego, Raffaele, 2015) about political party or candidate and eventually predict a voter's preference about political brand. Many studies have used Twitter data for the prediction of elections by using sentiments extracted from tweets in the USA, UK and other developed countries (Paul et al. 2017; Swamy, Ritter, and de Marneffe 2017; Grover et al. 2019). In the Indian context, as current generation uses social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) heavily, political candidates also prefer to use these platforms (Jain et al. 2017) to increase their visibility. The 2004 Lok Sabha elections in India saw, for the first time, the major use of new media by both national parties (Tekwani and Shetty, 2007) - Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Indian National Congress (INC). In 2009, major candidates from both the parties showed further inclination towards the idea of using the Internet as a platform for political campaigning (Pathak et.al., 2015). 2014 has been a landmark year when Narendra Modi came to power after a decade-old run by the Indian National Congress (Prabhu, 2014). Almost all national and regional political parties used different technological tools to target voters by sending curated content through mobiles and social media (Pathak et al. 2015).   India has one of the biggest elections in the world, that includes numerous candidates and political parties seeking votes from approximately a billion citizens. Interestingly, 15 million voters in the age bracket of 18-19 years had voted for the first time in 2019 Lok Sabha election (Business Standard, 2019). and this age group is assumed to be more technologically equipped than other age groups.   The above statistics prove that applying different tools and techniques across all the 542 parliamentary constituencies, by any political party, is a complex phenomenon and hence social media was used extensively (Hall, 2019) by all the parties to disseminate uniform campaign messaging. During the same period, Internet and social media have penetrated the Indian population significantly. In 2015, only 19.13% of total population used social media channels. That number increased significantly to 46.44% in 2019 (Statista, 2023).. Multiple studies (Hall, 2019; Jain et al. 2019; Kapoor and Dwibedi, 2015) pointed out that political parties used social media to influence a voter's decision regarding their preferred political brand. Bansal and Srivastava (2018) developed a predictive model with hybrid topic-based sentiment analysis of tweets. In the 2014 Indian Lok Sabha elections, social media buzzwords were used to analyse (Safiullah et. al., 2017) and predict election outcomes through a linear regression model. But there is no empirical study till date that has tried to measure the power or impact of a political party or candidate's social media strategy. Again, there are studies (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2018) which have tried to understand the effect of demography on a voter's choice about political brand. However, in India, there are very few empirical studies which have tried to predict a voter's preferred political brand based on combination of demography and political party or

candidates' social media attributes.

Based on the above argument and research gap, below is the research question of our study -

Research Question – While choosing a political brand/party during the Lok Sabha elections, how do multiple attributes of a political party or its primary leader's social media strategy impact a voter's decision-making?

Critical Factors of Social Media Campaigns and Demography in Context of Political Marketing in India

In the above section, we have formulated the research question of our study by identifying the research gaps in academic literature available from both developed and developing economies. The next step was to find the critical factors of both voter's demography and social media, that might significantly influence a voter's selection of a political party or brand. Though there are many studies (Clinton and Lapinski, 2004; Newman and Sheth, 1985) which mention the demographic factors influencing a voter's decision while selecting a political party during elections in developed nations, we have referred studies from developing nations. (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2018; Chowdhury and Naheed, 2019; Ganesh and Jain, 2019; Hall, 2019) to finalize the individual demographic factors, to be used in our study to understand the influence of voter's demography. Based on those studies, we would study the impact of the following demographic factors on a voter's decision while choosing a political brand:

1. Age

2. Occupation

3. Gender

4. Income

5. Marital Status

6. Educational Status

There are very limited studies, both in developed and developing economies, that point at important factors of a political party or candidate's social media strategy. Very few studies (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Moore, 2019) highlighted the importance of various factors of social media-driven political marketing such as - targeted social media messaging, frequent posts or tweets, online appearance of the party leader via video, how clearly has the political party's agenda been communicated, how effectively has the public been educated on various issues through social media, how effective is the reach of the party or leaders through multiple social media platforms ,how effectively has political propaganda about the opponent parties been spread etc.

In the Indian context, the quality and quantity of similar studies are negligible. Ganesh and Jain (2019) mentioned about the party leader's number of social media followers as one of the major reasons that drove a win at the elections. The higher the number of followers, higher are the chances of a win. Hall (2019) mentioned about the broadcasting of key slogans through social media as one of the important factors. As we were not able to finalize the critical factors of a political party or candidate's social media strategy, we conducted focussed group discussions to identify those.

3. Data & Methodology

Focussed Group Discussion

Due to the lack of adequate India-based studies that identify the factors of social media impact, we arranged a focussed group discussion to bring out the key factors of social media impact. Though focussed group discussions happen mostly with homogeneous groups, we conducted the discussion in heterogeneous groups (Thomas et al., 1995) to capture the opinion from different societal strata of voters. We have identified 6 people and one moderator (Assistant Professor of a Central Institute and with extensive experience in conducting focussed group discussions). Though focussed group discussions as the primary methodology has received mixed acceptance among political marketing researchers (Stanley, 2016), many studies (Gamson, 1992; Hopf, 2002; Jarvis and Lister, 2012) have used focussed group discussions as the primary methodology to find results of any analysis. However, we have used focussed group discussions as a supplementary method to augment our quantitative studies, similar to the study by Copsey (2008). We have used the "Single Focus Group" discussion technique (Morgan, 1996) as this technique has been widely used by both researchers and practitioners across different disciplines (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Morgan, 1996).

Based on previous studies, we have defined a clear rationale and objective of the focussed group discussion. The objective is to identify key social media factors which can be used in a primary survey. To be specific, we asked the group to respond keeping the 2019 Lok Sabha election as a point of reference. We created a questionnaire comprising 10 questions which was used by the moderator to drive the discussion. During the initial discussion, 14 themes emerged. After the final discussion, the group concluded 6 important factors which sum up how social media may impact voters. These are as follows:

- #Followers of the PM candidate on social media

- Frequency of posts/tweets by the PM candidate/

- Quality of social media content by a political party or the PM candidate

- PM candidate's or party's presence across multiple social media platforms

- Positive propaganda of a political party

- Negative propaganda of the opponent party

Design Survey Questionnaire

The first section of the questionnaire comprises questions related to demography such as age, gender, occupation, income, marital status, and educational status. For all the demographic variables, multiple choice options for categories were provided to the respondents to make all the independent variables as category variables. The second section of the questionnaire comprises questions about the voter's opinion on the importance of the factors (identified in the focussed group discussion) of social media to win an election. The importance was graded from 1 – 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. We chose this scale as this is the most reliable for data collection (Patwa et al., 2018). Response variable of the questionnaire is voter's preferred political brand. Based on India's political paradigm (Calì and Sen, 2011) and place of the survey, respondents were provided four options for political brands. These were as follows:

1. NDA (Primary party - BJP),

2. UPA (Primary party – Indian National Congress, alliance with Left Front),

3. Top regional party (TMC), and

4. Others

To check the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, we discussed the same with 9 experts and content validity ratio has come as 0.78, which is acceptable according to Lawsch table.

To remove the response bias, we have done the following things –

1. Developed neutrally worded questionnaire

2. Conducted pilot survey with 28 respondents and did test-retest reliability test with the gap of 1.5 months. Responses are 93% similar between first test and retest

3. Used Quota sampling method so that respondent profile distribution is almost similar to population profile distribution

4. Made the survey anonymous

Respondent profile of the study

We limited our scope of the study to the population of a state capital. We conducted the survey in Kolkata from August to December 2021. Kolkata is a state capital and a cosmopolitan city inhabited by people from all states and income classes (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2018). As greater Kolkata's population is approximately 1.5 crore, we chose 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. **Worthix' sample size calculator** provided the minimum sample size as 384. Considering 40% no response and equal demographic representation, sample size 600 was adequate. We sent the structured survey questionnaires (in a google form link) through email and social media channels (like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter). The questionnaires were sent to 1024 respondents, based in urban and semi-urban localities. We also conducted direct in-person survey with 83 individuals who weren't familiar with the use of technology or the internet. To be very specific, we considered Kolkata North, Kolkata South, Jadavpur, Dumdum, Barasat and Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituencies as the scope of our respondent profile. The survey was conducted from August 2021 to December 2021 and the Lok Sabha elections 2019 was set as the reference election while inviting responses to questions. Out of 1107 survey respondents, we received complete responses from 735 respondents.

Ethical Approval Statement

Ethical approval for this study was not required as all the respondents are aware of the purpose of this survey and none of the queries require personal sensitive information like healthcare details

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Figshare at https://figshare.com/s/016090fb64b482150987

Model

We built one empirical model to predict a voter's preferred political brand based on political party or candidate's social media strategy, along with voter demography details.

In our study, the dependent variable is "Preferred political brand" with four categories – NDA, UPA, TMC and Others. This dependent variable is categorical in nature and the categories are not ordered. Therefore, error terms are not distributed normally. So Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR) is more suitable than Ordinary Least Square methods. According to Johnston (1984), we have done logit transformation of dependent variable to make it easier to analyse. Through the MLR model, we have calculated the logarithms of odds of a voter preferring one political party in comparison to another reference party. In our model equation, we have kept NDA as our reference party and estimated the odd ratio of choosing TMC, UPA and Others, in comparison to NDA, for the change of unit of any one individual independent variable.

We have used SPSS software to analyse the data

4. Result, Analysis and Discussion

The result and analysis of this study consists of two parts that help us understand the importance of social media attributes while predicting a voter's preferred political brand:

1. Insights from descriptive analysis
2. Multinomial Logistic Regression results

Descriptive Analysis

Out of 6 social media impact variables, survey respondents think that influence of "negative propaganda by opponent party" is most to prefer any political brand.
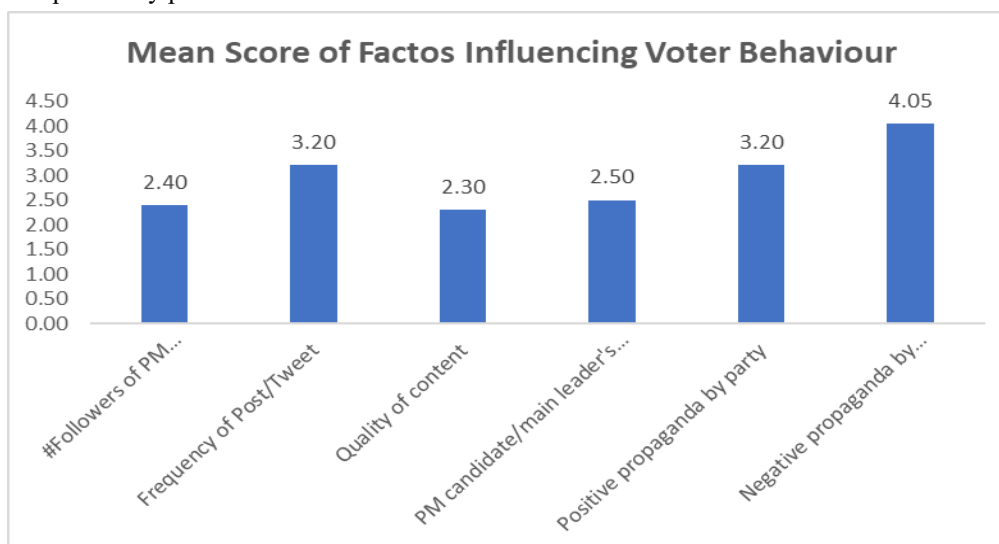

Figure 2. Mean Score of All Factors Influencing Voter Behavior

This finding is in similar line to the finding of the study of Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011), where authors mentioned that "rumours" about any party or leader in social media, influence voters' decision significantly. Respondents also think that "#Followers of PM candidate/Main leader" and "Quality of social media content" are not much important. First finding is contradictory to the studies of Jain and Ganesh (2019) where authors mentioned that NDA's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi's huge followers in social media, was one of the major reasons to prefer NDA in Lok Sabha election. Similarly, second finding is also contradictory to the study of Hall (2019), where the author mentioned about the influence of different party slogans through social media. According to our study, 39% of 1st age category (18-25) prefer NDA, while almost 48% of 2nd age group (26-40) prefer NDA. This is in line with the findings of the study by Jain et. al. (2017) where authors mentioned that younger age group preferred NDA and Narendra Modi. In terms of occupation, we can see that majority (47%) of daily wage earners prefer TMC. This finding resembles the findings by Sengupta, Mukherjee and Jebarajakirthy (2020). However, those employed in the government service prefer NDA (43%) more than private service holders (34%) and business people (36%). We can relate this finding to the study findings by Hall (2019), where authors mentioned about a greater sense of security during NDA's rule. For lower income groups, preference is almost equal for TMC (35%) and NDA (36%). However, for a higher income group, preference for NDA is way higher (38%) than TMC (29%). This finding is somewhat like the findings by Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020), where the authors highlighted the influence of NDA on voters belonging to higher

economic strata of the society. If we consider social media impact variables, 46% of respondents who prefer NDA don't think social media content is important to influence their decision. In contrast, 63% of respondents who prefer UPA as a political brand don't think social media content as important to influence their decision. 59%, 58% and 54% of survey respondents, who prefer NDA, UPA and TMC respectively as a political brand, think that negative propaganda by any opponent party on social media can influence voters significantly. 53% of younger age group (18 – 25 years) think that quality of content of social media is not much important to influence voter decision. In contrast to that, 48% of old age group respondents think that quality of content of social media is not at all important. This is opposite to the findings of the study by Safiullah et. al. (2017), where authors mentioned that younger age group consumes more political social media content. Voters across all education levels think that an opponent party's negative social media campaign can influence voters' decision significantly. This percentage is much higher for those with a graduate and postgraduate degree. A greater number of graduate and postgraduate respondents (than others) think #followers is very important to influence a voter's. This finding can be correlated to the finding of the study by Prabhu (2014), where he mentioned that more technologically equipped people (assuming respondents with higher education would be more technologically equipped) consume more social media content. Voters across all income levels think that #followers is not an important attribute to influence voters' decision while choosing any political brand.

Multinomial Logistic Regression

According to Model Fitting Information table, p value is 0.593 at 95% confidence interval in likelihood ratio test. This p value is used to compare between the intercept only model (which contains no predictors) and final model (which contains all the predictors) and find out whether all predictors combined are making any significant improvement to the final model output or not. As p value is greater than 0.05, we can say that there is no significant improvement in final model output than the output of intercept only model. This concludes that all the predictors combined do not have significant impact on predicting a voter's preferred political party. This is different from the observations of multiple qualitative studies (Jain and Ganesh, 2019; Safiullah et. al., 2017; Kapoor and Dwibedi, 2015). They have mentioned that social media factors play an important role in deciding the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections.

According to Likelihood Ratio Tests table, no demographic variables of our study are significant predictors. This is contradictory to the study of Lane (1959) where he found that age, gender and education are significant predictors of a voter's preference. Dalton (1996) mentioned about income as a critical factor that influences a voter's decision. In the Indian context, there are very limited quantitative studies to quantify the importance of demographic variables that influence voters' decision. Banerjee and Chaudhuri (2018) found that age, gender, educational status, marital status and income are insignificant predictors. This is exactly similar to our study except for occupation. However, our study finding is different from the qualitative study of Jain et. al. (2017) where they mentioned age as a significant factor that influences voters' decision. None of the social media impact variables are significant to predict a voter's preferred political brand. As there were not enough quantitative studies to understand the impact of different factors of party or main leader's social media strategy, we referred to the the observations from qualitative studies to compare with our study. Rodrigues and Niemann (2019) mentioned about Narendra Modi's (NDA's PM candidate) two key social media impact variables - #followers and quality of social media content as the major reasons for his popularity. This is opposite to our findings where both variables are insignificant for predicting a voter's preferred political brand. Hall (2019) mentions the importance of positive propaganda, "national security and rise of watchmen", as one of the major reasons that influences voters. But, according to our study, this variable is insignificant. Though 53% of overall respondents feel that negative social media campaign by the opponent party is very important, this is an insignificant predictor in terms of model output.

According to Parameter Estimates table, the odds of younger age group (18-25) selecting UPA is almost similar (only 0.9 times lower) to select NDA. This finding is opposite to the findings of the study by Jain et. al. (2017), where they mentioned that younger population prefer Modi. But the odds of younger age group (18-25) selecting TMC over NDA is 75% lower. This study is in line with the findings of the study of Kumar (2014). The odds of voters working in government service selecting UPA is only 31% lower over NDA, than 'Others' occupation group. This trend remains similar (according to our study) if we compare between UPA and TMC. Odds of respondents in the mid-level income group (INR 25,001 – 50,000 per month) selecting UPA over NDA is 76% higher than highest income level group (greater than INR 75,000 per month). This finding resembles the study by Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020) where the authors mentioned that middle class people were gradually moving away from NDA post 2017. If we consider educational status, the odds of voters with an undergraduate degree selecting UPA over NDA is 87% higher than the respondents with a post-graduate degree and above.

Among the social media impact variables, our study indicates that #followers on social media is a variable that did not significantly influence voters to prefer NDA over UPA and TMC and vice versa. The odds of respondents providing lesser importance to #followers on social media selecting UPA and TMC over NDA are almost similar (0.9 and 1.1

times respectively) than respondents providing highest importance to #followers in social media. This contradicts the study by Safiullah et. al. (2017) which mentions Modi's number of #followers on social media an important attribute for political marketing. Odds of respondents who consider the quality of social media content unimportant while selecting UPA and TMC over NDA are almost 43% and 21% higher, respectively, than respondents who consider the quality of social media content important. This finding is in line with the observations from the study of Rodrigues and Niemann (2019), which mentions that Narendra Modi used quality social media content to influence voters about demonetization. Odds of respondents providing least importance to negative social campaign by opponent party while selecting UPA and TMC over NDA is similar to the respondents providing highest importance to negative social campaign by opponent party. This is not in line with the findings by Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) where the authors mentioned that 'rumours' by a rival party negatively influences voters. The odds of respondents who are neutral about the primary leader's presence across multiple social platforms, while selecting UPA and TMC over NDA are almost 54% and 9% higher, respectively, than respondents who consider this factor important. This echoes the study by Kapoor and Dwibedi (2015) which mentioned that Modi gained popularity through his presence across multiple social media platforms and increasing his direct reach among the voters.

5. Real World Implications

Measuring the power of social media to predict voter preference is a complex phenomenon in India with its multi-party democratic electoral system and political marketers are trying to find new tools and technologies to influence voters' decision. From our study, we can say that though social media campaign generates significant brand recall (Kapoor and Dwibedi, 2015), but it is not very pertinent while creating an influence on the final choice of a political party/brand during the Lok Sabha elections for voters. The result of our study indicates that none of the demographic and social media variables have any significant predicting power to influence voters' decision. So, political marketers should take care to not provide major importance or only importance to the social media campaign strategy. It is recommended that they use other relevant marketing tools as well apart from social media campaigns.

We also observe that a significant number of voters (53%) feel that negative social media campaigning by an opponent party influences voter. Apart from that, respondents think that the frequency of posts/tweets and positive social media campaign are two other influential factors. So, political marketers may consider designing social media campaigns around highlighting negative aspects of opponent parties and positive aspects of their own party. They should also consider increasing the primary leader's frequency and number of social media posts/tweets.

Our study also examined the comparative differences between NDA, UPA and TMC for the impact of each demographic and social media impact variables. This would help political marketers to identify the strong and weak points of different political parties in the context of the Lok Sabha elections and design the campaign strategy accordingly. For example, according to our study, respondents who are neutral about the prime ministerial candidate or primary leader's social media reach or presence across multiple social media platforms are more likely to vote for UPA and TMC than NDA. Thus, political marketers of UPA and TMC should increase their presence across multiple social media platforms to influence a greater number of voters. Respondents, who think quality of social media content is important are more likely to vote for NDA than UPA, TMC and Others. These insights would help political marketers of UPA and TMC to understand the need of producing quality social media content. Government service holders are less likely to vote for NDA than private service and business class people. This kind of insight would help NDA's political marketers to design their campaign and communication plan for specific target groups.

6. Study Limitation and Future Research Area

In this study, we have only considered six demographic variables and six social media impact variables. As we don't have adequate Indian literature regarding power or impact of social media campaign, we referred to US-based study to find the superset of social media impact variables. These six social media impact variables are finally decided through focussed group discussions and may not be exhaustive. Similarly, there are many other factors (apart from social media) which contribute to the voters' preference about a political brand/party in the context of Indian Lok Sabha election. Hence, the 1st future research area can include finding more social media impact variables and analyse the impact of those variables.

We have considered a limited number of people from 6 Lok Sabha constituencies within a single location (greater Kolkata) in our survey. Though it met the criteria of the minimum sample size, we have not considered other metro cities like Delhi, Mumbai or Chennai to understand the impact of these variables. Thus, the sample may not represent the entire population of India. So, 2nd future research area can include increasing the breadth of the survey and include other metro cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

We have used only one traditional statistical technique – multinomial logistic regression to find the relation among demographic, social media impact variables and voters' preferred political brand. If new areas are included to increase

the number of respondents, and consecutively the data volume is increased significantly, then a 3rd future research area can evolve. This can include using modern machine learning based techniques to develop a predictive model for voters' preferred political party or brand and compare the findings with our study.

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